

**TYPICAL ENGLISH  
CHURCHMEN.  
SERIES II.**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649182848

Typical English churchmen. Series II. by Various

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**VARIOUS**

**TYPICAL ENGLISH  
CHURCHMEN.  
SERIES II.**



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LXXVIII

## TYPICAL ENGLISH CHURCHMEN.

SERIES II.

FROM WYCLIF TO GARDINER.

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PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE TRACT COMMITTEE.

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SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

LONDON: NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, W.C.;

43, QUEEN VICTORIA STREET, E.C.

BRIGHTON: 119, NORTH STREET.

NEW YORK: EDWIN S. GORHAM

1909.

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# I

## JOHN WYCLIF

BY

REV. JOHN NEVILLE FIGGIS, Litt.D.

OF THE COMMUNITY OF THE RESURRECTION

[*Authorities.* The materials for determining the character of Wyclif's system are chiefly to be found in the Latin Works published by the Wyclif Society. Of these the most important are the *De Civili Dominio* and the *De Ecclesia*. These, with two volumes entitled the *Polemical Works*, illustrate sufficiently nearly all his ideas. Most of them, however, are summed up in the *Triologus*, which was edited in 1869 by Dr. Lechler, Oxford. In Mr. Shirley's edition (Rolls Series) of the *Fasciculi Zizaniorum* will be found various interesting documents, which give a bird's-eye view of Lollard polemic. An interesting set of Lollard conclusions has just been published by this Society, edited by Professor Collins. The conclusions of Wyclif (or said to be from him) condemned by the Council of Constance are with Woodford's treatise to be found in Brown's *Fasciculus*. His English writings are mainly in Arnold's *Select Works of John Wyclif* (3 vols., Oxford), Matthew's *Unprinted Writings of John Wyclif* (Oxford). Vaughan's *Tracts and Treatises of John Wyclif*, published for the old Wyclif Society in 1844, contains beside a translation of parts of the *Triologus*, the famous sermon Wyclif's *Wykket*, and a few other pieces.

For his life the chief authorities are Knighton's *Chronicle*, Walsingham's *Chronicon Angliæ*, of which the more complete form is the *Chronicon* of the Monk of St. Albans, and the *Eulogium Historiarum*, Vol. iii. All of these are in the Rolls Series.

Of modern works Lechler's *Life* is the most important. For the external history there is the brilliant sketch *The Age of Wyclif*, by Mr. G. M. Trevelyan. On his relation to Hus see Loserth, *Wyclif and Hus*. Mr. Poole's *Wyclif and Movements of Reform* in the 'Epochs of Church History,' together with his chapters in *Illustrations of the History of Medieval Thought* and article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, are invaluable as an exposition of Wyclif's ideas, in relation to the life and thought of the fourteenth century. The best single account is the exhaustive study by Dr. Rashdall in the *Dictionary of National Biography*—to which the reader is referred for further information on books and other matters. Dr. Rashdall's account of Wyclifism in the *Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* should also be consulted. I have only glanced at Mr. Capes's account in the new series of 'English Church Histories,' but it may be safely recommended. There is a brief but very suggestive review of Lechler in the volume of posthumous *Essays* by Bishop Creighton.]

THE sole merits of this study are that it is based on a first-hand investigation, and that it seeks to take no side, but

merely to determine the place of Wyclif in the historical development of the Christianity of this country, and indeed of Europe. We now know, or may know, the leading ideas of Wyclif in a way which was not possible a generation back. Although some of his works are still unpublished, yet with the possible exceptions of the *De Universalibus*, and the latter portions of the *De Civili Dominio*, it is unlikely that those remaining unprinted would add materially to our knowledge. As a writer Wyclif is as prolific as he is dull. He repeats himself with such amazing frequency that it is easy to get a notion of his system by a comparatively small selection<sup>1</sup>. A person, not quite ignorant of scholastic debates, who should carefully study the *Trialogus*, would (with some exception in regard to the doctrine of lordship) carry away a very fairly comprehensive notion of the *Weltanschauung* of the Doctor Evangelicus.

Nor shall I attempt to narrate in detail the well-known story of Wyclif's life, especially as the inclusion of William of Wykeham and Courtenay in this series will have made the reader familiar with both the general and ecclesiastical history of the fourteenth century. For purposes of convenience, however, it may be well to precede the discussion of the points which seem to me to arise out of the subject by a very brief *résumé* of the outlines of the life of Wyclif.

Born probably about 1320 at Hipswell near Richmond in Yorkshire, John Wyclif studied at Balliol, of which College he was afterwards elected Master between 1356 and 1360. In 1361 he accepted the living of Fillingham, but returned to Oxford in 1363, residing in Queen's<sup>2</sup>. About five years later he was given the living of Ludgershall near Oxford, combining parochial and academic duties. His enemies always recognized his eminence as a scholar and philosopher. He was almost the last whom mediæval Oxford produced. Knighton, an unsparing critic, tells us that "In philosophia nulli reputaba-

<sup>1</sup> On this ground I can refrain from quoting references, except for some special reason, in this paper. For each of Wyclif's ideas, it would be necessary to refer not to one but to a hundred places.

<sup>2</sup> Knighton, ii. 151.



tur secundus, in scholasticis disciplinis incomparabilis." He proceeded to his D.D. in 1370. Even before this he must have been one of the most influential leaders of Oxford. His power of attracting followers among young men was little inferior to that of the founder of another very different Oxford Movement.

By this time Wyclif had become a person of weight, not merely as a University teacher (although that position was probably less obscure in the fourteenth than in the "enlightened" twentieth century), but as a popular and patriotic politician. We do not know the exact date at which began that influence at court which was to stand him in such good stead. But we know that the papal tribute begun by King John was refused by the English Parliament in 1366. And it is thought that a tract of Wyclif, written in the capacity of *peculiaris clericus regius*, in defence of the national action against the pope, may refer to this. But it seems now more probable that the tract was written in 1376-7, and refers to a later episode of 1374. But at least by this time it is clear that he was regarded in the light of a leader, on what was at once the royal and the popular side of English independence against papal aggression. It is curious, indeed, to find him putting into the mouths of the seven lords of the council, whose speeches on the subject he professes to give, his own highly elaborated subtleties on the subject of civil lordship, i. e. of property and government. It was said by his enemies that this, together with all Wyclif's anti-papal and polemical writings, was really due to his having been ousted from the headship of Canterbury Hall in favour of a regular. That this happened to a John Wyclif is indubitable. But the opinion of the better scholars appears to be that the hero of the transaction was not the reformer but another cleric of the same name. In any case the alleged cause is no more sufficient to account for an attitude characteristic of the whole mental standpoint of a singularly acute and thorough-going thinker, than is the ignorant attribution by shallow persons of all political, social or economic movements which they dislike, to the diabolical ingenuity of interested agitators.

No great movement can ever be due only to pique or self-interest.

However it be with Canterbury Hall, the connexion of Wyclif with popular anti-papalism was not by this time his only offence against ecclesiastical order. He had developed, and in his *De Civili Dominio* published views that were certainly startling even in an age which was more accustomed to the paradoxes of philosophers than we choose to imagine. Their real animus, however, was so directly against the whole hierarchical system, as a legal establishment, that they were certain to procure at once notice and animadversion on the part of that section of clerics, common enough in all days, who realize more clearly than their brethren that the Church on its economic side is a vested interest, and are therefore convinced of the necessity of securing it against attack by claiming for its pecuniary and legal rights a higher than human sanction. Wyclif attacked not only the pope as an alien power but all endowments, and especially the monastic orders. It was long before he attacked the friars or the current doctrine of the Eucharist. In one sense indeed he was popular, as expressing a very general anti-papal feeling—how general this was the statutes of Provisors and Premunire show; but we must not suppose that the bulk of the clergy shared this feeling, and we must bear in mind what is too often forgotten, that the second statute of Provisors was passed in the teeth of episcopal opposition. But still Wyclif, although the Crown had appointed him in 1374 rector of Lutterworth and an ambassador to meet the papal legate on this very question, had become a party man. Nor was it a worthy party to which he belonged. John of Gaunt was the incarnation of all that was worst alike in the aristocracy and the royal house<sup>1</sup>. Wyclif's fame would at this day be higher had he escaped a connexion which may have been innocent enough in origin, but led to one of the least creditable episodes in his life. That Wyclif was present at some

<sup>1</sup> Since this was written Mr. Armitage Smith has done a little to relieve John of Gaunt of the burden of guilt; yet the association of Wyclif with him remains discreditable.

Parliament is undoubted from his own words, but there is no real evidence to connect him with the Good Parliament of 1376—nor is it easy to see what he could have done there. That assembly was, as is well known, abortive in its results. John of Gaunt packed its successor, repealed its acts, released its prisoners, and, in his turn, attacked and imprisoned no less a person than the Chancellor and Bishop of Winchester, William of Wykeham—the representative of all that was best in the secular cleric of the day. At the time it was impossible to attack the duke directly. But the hierarchy, as the monk of St. Albans tells us, resolved on a counter-blow against the duke's favourite. Wyclif was summoned to a council in London in February, 1377. Strangely enough, he was saved from an adverse decision by the unpopularity of his supporter. John of Gaunt and Lord Percy appeared to protect the accused, who was, it is to be noted, accompanied at this his first answer by four mendicant D.D.'s. A dispute between Percy and Bishop Courtenay, as to whether Wyclif was to sit down, led to the interference of the populace on behalf of their bishop. A riot ensued and the council came to nothing.

The pope, Gregory XI, who had just returned to Rome and ended the Babylonish captivity, doubtless instigated by Courtenay, dispatched five Bulls against the teaching which was so subversive of the rights of ecclesiastical property, three to the archbishop—who is complained of as being very slack in offending John of Gaunt, one to the chancellor of the University, and one to the king. Wyclif, however, was at this very time being consulted by Parliament, as to the right of stopping the papal supplies. And it is not surprising that the Princess of Wales, i. e. Richard II's mother, stopped the trial—much of course to the disgust of the anti-Lollard chroniclers for the pusillanimity of the bishop. As a matter of fact the bishop's compliance was assisted by the persuasions of the mob. At any rate, nothing was done except to increase the popularity of Wyclif, both in Oxford and London.

We now enter on the closing period of the reformer's life